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A Letter From a Venerable Member of the Illinois State Historical Society

To Jessie Palmer Weber,
Dear Lady:—

In an effort to comply with the request you made me last May, when I called on you at your office in Springfield, Illinois, that I write something of my experience and observations, to be printed in the records of the Illinois Historical Society, I herewith submit these lines.

My birthday will be October 1st, 1916, at which time I will be 93 years old. I am in fairly good health and strength, I think of reasonable sound mind and memory; but I realize that the time is soon to arrive when I shall surrender all earthly ties and possessions and take that last and final journey into the unknown and unknowable hereafter.

First, I wish to declare my abiding faith and loyalty to the foundation principles of our great and glorious government. (Made sacred, and I hope secure for all time to come by the shedding of so much precious blood.) The first is that all men are created equal; and when I say men I mean men and women.

The second great principle is that all are equally entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and when I pledge allegiance to that principle, I do not mean that it carries with it a license for one man to encroach upon the rights or liberties of his fellow-man; man's liberties cease where the lawful rights of his fellow-man begin. I believe in the organization and consolidation of wealth, of labor, of intellect, where the object and aim of said organization and consolidation is for the good of humanity, the welfare of the nation. But, I am opposed to such organization and consolidation when the object is to oppose just laws, thwart justice and strangle healthy competition. While I believe in the intercourse of nations under well defined international laws, or rules of action, and that Americans while domiciled in a foreign country should recog-

nize and obey the laws of the country in which they are sojourning, yet I believe in a fealty and loyalty which knows but one allegiance and that allegiance is and always has been with me America—my America. And I claim that we have a right to demand and enforce the position that all persons exercising the right of citizenship and claiming protection under our flag should yield strict, undivided allegiance to our flag, to our laws, to our country, and again, when he or she has done this, and is doing this, they are entitled to the protection of this government in all that the word protection implies, when taken in connection with those words—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It matters not whether that citizen is upon our own soil or upon the high seas or in foreign lands. Under treaty arrangement or under international laws, made by the civilized nations of the world, he should be made to feel secure in his life, his liberty and his property rights, under the strong arm of this nation, which if clearly asserted and forcefully demanded will always have the moral support of the law-loving people of all civilized nations. For me I have but one national allegiance and that is America. I have but one party allegiance and that is progressive republicanism. I have but one religious allegiance and that is the cause of humanity. I have but one objective allegiance and that is to do good. I have always welcomed the torches of knowledge, of light, of love. I have always tried to stand on the solid rocks of reason and truth.

I was born in Wilson County, Tennessee, near Lebanon, October 1st, 1823. I was brought by my father and mother, Nathaniel Gowin and Sabry Gowin, by covered wagon and ox-team in 1827 up through Kentucky, across the corner of Indiana into the southeastern part of Illinois and then across the sparsely settled region of south-central Illinois, until we reached the country now known as Jersey County, Illinois. Into the west woods as it was called, a few miles west of where Jerseyville now stands, my father pulled, as it would not do to stop away out on the wild and wind-swept prairies. Shifting from one locality to another small settlement, through what is now Jersey County (then a part of Greene), I spent my boy-

hood and young manhood days, sometimes on foot, sometimes on horseback, sometimes in old-style farm wagons, I traveled over the unbroken ground where the city of Jerseyville now stands. Many the furrow in the virgin soil I plowed, many the tree I felled, many the rail I split, many the day a cradle I swung to cut the golden grain. In 1846 I was married to Nancy Beeman. To this union ten children were born. Four of them died in early infancy and childhood, six of them grew to manhood and womanhood as follows: Stephen L., now of Fulton, Missouri; Ellis M., drowned in 1901 near Buffalo, Missouri, at the age of 51 years; Nannie T., now Mrs. Walter Grundy (a widow), at Morrisonville, Ill.; Arnest E., residing now at Morrisonville, Illinois; Orman G., now a resident of McCune, Kansas, and Mary A. now Mary A. Gorman (a widow) of Muskogee, Oklahoma. In 1868 I moved with my family to Montgomery Co., Ill. In 1884 I moved with my wife to McCune, Kansas. In 1896 we celebrated our fiftieth anniversary of wedded life. In 1900 my wife died. She was buried at McCune, Kansas. In 1903, I was married to Louisa Campbell of Jerseyville, Illinois. Lived there one year, then we moved to McCune, Kansas. In 1916 my second wife died. She also was buried at McCune, Kansas. I am at this writing still maintaining my home at McCune, Kansas.

I have voted at eighteen presidential elections, thirteen of those I have voted for have been elected. If I live and have my health at election time this fall, I shall vote for Charles E. Hughes for president, and of course expect him to be elected.

While I have lived for a great many years in Kansas, there has scarcely been a year when I did not return once or twice to Illinois. I have always kept in close touch with her progress and development and have personally known so many of her great men and having been so closely related to and associated with so very, very many of her so-called ordinary men and women, it is still a comfort and inspiration to mingle with so great a people.

My advice to those beginning in life is, be industrious, be saving, be honest, be temperate in all things, be true to yourself and just to others, and above all else be true and loyal to your government, be brave to meet the issues of the day as they arise and be strong to battle ever for the right.

MINER S. GOWIN.

McCune, Kansas.